

RACISM COMES TO POWER IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Threat of White Nationalism

T. C. ROBERTSON

Slowly but surely a racial self-consciousness, a collective resentment, is being forced upon the Negro, not only in South Africa but throughout the world, and South Africa seems the inevitable theatre for its release. (H. G. Wells, The Outlook for Homo Sapiens.)

NATIONALISM in South Africa could quite logically be associated with any one of the Bantu tribes which, before its organization was shattered by impact with the white pioneers, had almost evolved to nationhood—the Zulu or the Basutu, for instance. But no such meaning attaches to the “nationalism” which in May scored an unexpected election triumph and made possible the formation of a new government in the country. On the contrary, in

THE recent victory of the Nationalist party in South Africa came as a shock to a world which had almost persuaded itself that the defeat of Nazism meant the end of racist nationalism as a political force in our times. T. C. ROBERTSON here analyzes the present “white nationalism” of South Africa—with its denial of any hope of a common citizenship to the black man and its anti-Semitic overtones—in terms of the long history of troubled race relations and economic exploitation in that country. Mr. Robertson was born in the Transvaal in 1907 of an Afrikaner family. Both his father and his grandfather were Nationalist members of Parliament for Witbank; Mr. Robertson himself was an unsuccessful candidate for this parliamentary seat in the last general election, standing as a member of the United party of General Smuts. Mr. Robertson has been political correspondent for South Africa's two largest English-language newspapers, the *Sunday Times* and the *Rand Daily Mail*; during the past war, he was at the head of the government organization set up to counter internal pro-Nazi propaganda.

TRANSVAAL, SOUTH AFRICA

the vocabulary of that party a “nationalist” denotes a citizen of European descent whose language is Afrikaans and who believes the doctrine that this little nation of less than a million and a half people has “the God-ordained mission to maintain its identity, superiority, and rule” in Southern Africa. Moreover, there are laws to prevent the Zulu or Basutu from preaching the same thing about his nation, no matter how ardently he might believe in the doctrine.

It is in the contradictions of this situation that we find the very essence of the country's future problems.

This jealous and exclusive “nationalism for the few” might at first appear to be a form of collective megalomania. But there is some historical justification for the self-confidence. These Afrikaners are “the Boers” who in 1836—about the time that Texas declared its independent nationhood—began their northward migration in search of a country and freedom from British rule. Their history is a saga of adventure, hardship, courage, and faith which earned the admiration of the world. In battle they destroyed two savage black despotisms. In politics they created a republican form of government. And in the process the embryonic nation acquired a name, the Afrikaners, and a language, Afrikaans.

WITH “savage Africa” defeated, survival appeared to depend on successful resistance to militant and grasping British imperialism. The marksmen of their commandos, peasants and hunters of incredible skill, defeated the small British forces assembled in 1881—only to lose the devastating Three Years' War at the turn of the century. The military phase of the struggle ended in a mood of despair, but the determined politi-

cal leadership of two Boer War generals, Botha and Smuts, demonstrated that there were other weapons. By bargaining they achieved first of all representative government and then self-government for the Union of South Africa. They preached the One Stream Policy—a policy of conciliation which maintained that the British and Afrikaner elements should co-operate in building the future.

The European racial stocks in South Africa are probably less diverse than those in the United States of America. But in this country the “melting pot process,” which produces the hundred per cent American, has never been very successful. Its failure to operate is principally due to bilingualism, to the latent antithesis between Afrikaans and English. But to a lesser extent the failure is constitutional and due to the conflict between monarchism and republicanism.

These factors dominated political thought during the first two decades of the 20th century. In 1906 there had been a cultural renaissance, the Second Language Movement, and Afrikaners began producing poetry, drama, and fiction as their language achieved a certain philological stability. The heroism and suffering of the war, and the freedom-myth, were the inspiration and theme.

The movement also took political form and the Nationalist party was born in 1912 when another Boer War general, Hertzog, who had at first cooperated with Botha and Smuts, left them to champion Afrikaans and republicanism. But continued development was not yet a mere question of intellectual conflict. There were still several chapters of violence in the saga of the Afrikaner “nation.” World War I produced an upheaval and created an emotional background which enabled Smuts to drive home his policy of cooperation with Britain. Indeed, Smuts has always been most successful when international events overshadowed the domestic scene. At the outbreak of war the extremist Afrikaners went into revolt, but achieved only a few more martyrs with whom to embellish the myth. Their victories were

still on the cultural front and in 1914 a start was made with teaching Afrikaans in the schools, although the Bible had not yet been translated and Dutch was still the language of the pulpit. Under Hertzog their politicians made skilful use of the Allied propaganda that the war was being fought to safeguard the rights of small nations. A deputation of Nationalist leaders, after visiting New York, went to Versailles in 1919 to appeal to President Wilson to give their small nation, the Afrikaners, its sovereign independence.

While this relentless republican agitation—the first phase in the development of the Nationalist party—was going on, there were other Afrikaners, fighting side by side with the British, who played a gallant part in driving the German colonial forces from Africa and then went on to fight in Flanders. They were contributing to the Commonwealth ideal. Smuts himself had coined the phrase “British Commonwealth of Nations,” but it was Hertzog who later gave it legal form.

THIS historical background inevitably produced the great illusion of South African politics: that its problem was merely one of discovering a *modus vivendi* for Britisher and Afrikaner and settling the constitutional relationships within the Commonwealth. The real problem of Southern Africa had not yet emerged with any degree of clarity. It is, in effect, a problem in human ecology on a vast scale—the adaptation of the European to a sub-tropical and tropical environment and his relationship with the black races which had already achieved a high degree of physiological adaptation in that environment. The subjugation of the blacks, due to the superiority of gunpowder over assegai and shield, had been easy to accomplish. While Caliban was not actually kept in chains, he was doomed to perpetual serfdom in the political philosophy of the Afrikaners, who bitterly resented the British policy which, under missionary influence, had started to give equal rights to the blacks (Bantu) and coloreds (Malayans, Hotten-

tots, and the children of mixed marriages) in the Cape Province. But British capitalist imperialism in the northern provinces had no such missionary zeal. Before the Anglo-Boer War it already needed one hundred and ten thousand black workers for the gold mines; and that figure was soon to be doubled. Cecil Rhodes had attempted to formulate a policy in his Glen Grey Act. It envisaged a black peasantry migrating seasonally to work on the mines. But insufficient land was provided. It also failed because conditions in the peasant reserves could never be made more attractive than those of labor in the mines; otherwise, obviously, there would be no migration.

The South African Labor party, in closer contact with industrial conditions, first sensed the growing skill and possible encroachment of the black man on what had hitherto been regarded as the exclusive sphere of the European. Originally this party had been modeled on traditional British democratic socialism. But under South African conditions this policy changed into that queer contradiction in terms, "white socialism." It envisaged complete territorial and occupational segregation even to the extent of operating the gold mines with white labor. The Nationalists in 1924 formed an alliance with this Labor party on the agreed platform that "big finance," the capitalist interests of the gold mines, was the main enemy of South Africa. The Nationalists dropped their republican agitation and, assisted by the difficulties of postwar economic and industrial dislocation, succeeded in defeating Smuts.

This Nationalist-Labor government had a comparatively good record and Hertzog, the high priest of republicanism, eventually came to accept the Statute of Westminster as being synonymous with "sovereign independence." But the realities of the native problem were beginning to demand attention, with the result that the segregation policy was formulated. The approach was negative, based on the exploitation of racial antagonism rather than on a program of constructive development for the non-

Europeans in their own areas. Indeed, the 1929 election is still known as the "Black Menace Campaign" and Smuts and his followers were decisively defeated. It required another international crisis to bring them back to power. On this occasion it was not war but the world economic slump which provided the opportunity. When Great Britain left the gold standard, the Nationalist government, as a gesture of "sovereign economic independence," refused to follow suit; the consequences were disastrous for South Africa. Hertzog was forced to cooperate with Smuts.

It was at this stage that Malan, the present Prime Minister, formed his own party. He called it the "Purified Nationalist" party. Republicanism and Afrikaner nationalism were revived with more than the original emotional intensity. But there was a new force at large in the world and these Afrikaners soon began to take lessons from Adolf Hitler's National Socialism. Indeed, the followers of Malan were soon dubbed the Malanazis. In 1936 the celebration of the centenary of the Great Trek gave them an ideal propaganda opportunity and the festivities acquired all the flags, symbolism, and parades of a party day in Nuremberg.

There has been much speculation as to the prewar relations of Malan's party with Nazi Germany. Gauleiter Ernst Bohle, head of the Organization for Germans Abroad, was South African born, and this fact, combined with the strategic importance of the Cape sea route, inevitably resulted in the country receiving a great deal of attention. Goebbels, too, sent an emissary—ostensibly a distinguished academic gentleman on a goodwill tour. A copy of his report, the "Durkheim Report," subsequently fell into the hands of the Smuts government. Professor Durkheim's conclusions about South Africa are obvious. "Afrikaner nationalism," he wrote back to Goebbels, "is the wide portal through which National Socialism will enter the country. This movement, especially in its extremist forms, should be given every encouragement."

It is unlikely that there was ever any formal understanding between Malanism and Nazism. What was happening was merely that the South African Nationalist party was assuming some of the outward form, ideological direction, and program of National Socialism in Germany. Malan himself had socialistic tendencies. In his youth he had written a pamphlet in defence of Marxism. During the war he boasted that no economic reform introduced by Nazism in Germany had not already been incorporated in the platform of his own party.

Anti-Semitism became one of the slogans of the day. It had not previously been a political factor of any consequence. When Hertzog achieved his first victory in 1924 he had liberal Jewish support. President Kruger, in the days of the old Transvaal Republic, was noted for his pro-Jewish sentiments. One of the few visits which the Afrikaner patriarch paid to Johannesburg, the city of gold and greed which he hated, was to lay the foundation stone of the new synagogue. Malan and his party, however, banned Jews from becoming members. Their anti-Semitism was based on the familiar demographic argument, on the contention that there was a "safety point" in the population ratio and if the percentage of Jews exceeded this, racial antagonism and conflict became inevitable. No exact figures were available but it was estimated that Jews constituted about seven per cent of the European population in South Africa. The Nationalist party demanded that all further Jewish immigration should be stopped. The early Jewish pioneers had been financially successful in the distributive trades and it was their ambition to provide their sons with professional careers, with the result that the number of Jews in medicine and law became noticeably large. Accordingly, the Nationalist party demanded a quota system for the professions according to which each racial group would be given licenses in proportion to its numerical strength in the white population.

Anti-Semitic propaganda of the more virulently racial type was also begun and the chief offender in this sphere of party activity

was Eric Louw, a member of the present Cabinet and the man who has been chosen to represent South Africa at the United Nations Assembly. He will present the country's case for the incorporation of the mandated territory of South West Africa into the Union.

WHEN war was declared in September 1939, Malan joined forces with Hertzog in an attempt to keep South Africa neutral. They were defeated by Smuts. It was a repetition of the familiar pattern of political development, of international events overshadowing local conflicts and ideas. The political scene had flashed back to 1914, when pro- and anti-British Afrikaner elements took sides in the war, and the Nationalist party had regressed to 1912 and now manifested an even more intense emotional nationalism. The conclusion of an immediate peace with Germany was their main platform, for it was argued that the victory of Nazism was inevitable.

The war which fanned the flames of Afrikaner nationalism also made another small spark in Africa glow more brightly. To some extent the black races of the continent, under the control of European imperialisms, were drawn into the conflict. When the warriors, putting aside their shields and spears, were taught to handle rifles, they felt a vague sense of military power and cohesion.

Afrikaners in the Western province, the "cradle" of their nationhood, sneered when they saw the contingents of black West African troops disembark from the convoys and parade through the streets of Cape Town, the mother city of the Afrikaner. Were these, they asked, the crusaders spoken of by Smuts? In French Equatorial Africa de Gaulle was attempting to raise an army. The British were mobilizing the Askari of Central Africa. Smuts, too, attempted to use the vast reserve of black manpower in South Africa. But he had to yield to the unanimous opposition of the Nationalists and of the majority of his own Afrikaner supporters on one vital point: that black

men in South Africa could be used as laborers, stretcher bearers, or truck drivers, but they were not to be trained in the use of small arms. The idea, which nobody expressed publicly, was that in the event of a future conflict the rifle and the machine gun would remain the *ultima ratio* of the white man. It was only when the conflict became desperate that the warlike Zulu were trained as artillerymen. A twenty-five pounder, after all, would be easy to confiscate and hard to conceal. The Zulu Regent named the regiment "Upumalangi"—which means "the sun is rising."

But the war had another vital effect, which could not be restricted or controlled, on race relations in South Africa. It brought industrialization, created alternative employment, and accelerated the movement from the country to the towns. The repercussion of this trend was to become a decisive factor in the general election of 1948.

This Nazification of Afrikaner nationalism, stimulated by the preliminary military successes of Germany, did, however, alarm the powerful and rigidly orthodox Calvinistic churches in the country. In March 1941 they launched a campaign to reject the New Order and to substitute "a Christian National Republic based on a real Calvinist foundation." Their main fear was the possible subjection of church to state. The "leader principle" they rejected as ungodly, for theirs was essentially a theocratic conception of the state.

For more than a year preachers, professors, and politicians were busy concocting this strange brew of politics and theology. Their main axiom was based on the belief in predestination, and accordingly they proclaimed that the Afrikaner people "had the God-ordained mission to maintain its identity, superiority, and rule" in Southern Africa.

There is some scientific evidence that the rate of absorption of Bantu genes into the European population in South Africa is on the increase. This fact was either ignored or condemned as the work of the devil and in order to assist providence in maintaining the ordained "identity," the most rigid laws

against miscegenation were to be introduced and enforced. There is much scientific evidence that the black man in Africa is not inherently intellectually inferior to the white man; that it will not require the course of evolutionary time to develop his skill up to our level. But "superiority" was part of the axiom and justified by many scriptural references to "God-ordained differences between nations." The existence of this "superiority" precluded any possibility, however remote, of equality.

WHILE this speculation was going on in the ranks of the Nationalist party, the rest of South Africa was too preoccupied with its war effort to pay much attention. Hitler had attacked Russia, and Japan was moving southwards in the Pacific. All that seemed important was that the Nationalist party had announced its emphatic rejection of Nazism. Nobody, however, had much time for a detailed study of the ideological alternative. Some time had to elapse before it became obvious that this Christian, Calvinistic republicanism did not have much in common with liberal democracy.

Yet the practical effect of this reformulation of ideological direction was important. It destroyed the Nationalist party's unity of organization and made it impossible for them to win the general election of 1943. Smuts and his government were to be given another five years. Then the Nationalists started to close their ranks. Their party leaders, noted for their astuteness in tactics, realized that a general election could not be fought on an abstruse theological level. They decided to repeat the Hertzog "Black Menace" campaign of 1929 and, like the Nationalist party of those days, to put republicanism in "cold storage." They assured South Africa that the constitution would not be changed on a bare election majority. The issue would be determined by a referendum and then only if the "vast majority of the people" favored the change.

The Nationalist campaign attempted to unify the Europeans by persuading them that they had to face a common enemy, the

black man. The British were promised that their rights would be respected and the Jews were promised that anti-Semitism had been dropped. If a Nationalist government were returned to power it would immediately recognize the State of Israel. (The United party anticipated them.) The eagle, badge of their pro-Nazi days, had hatched a dove. A committee of the party produced a policy labelled "Apartheid," i.e. separateness. Its goal was in effect an absolute territorial division between European and native so that ultimately there would be in South Africa a region in which no native, and another in which no European, would be regarded as a permanent inhabitant. Practical methods of achieving this division were hardly discussed, for the election was mainly fought on the propaganda slogan: "Vote for a White South Africa." All the emphasis was on the "Black Menace."

In August 1946 General Smuts' government had appointed a commission to enquire into the operation of the laws in force in the Union relating to natives in or near urban areas, the native pass laws, and the system of migratory labor. The chairman of this commission was a judge of the Appeal Court and a former Nationalist Minister of Native Affairs. The report is generally considered an outstanding example of thorough sociological research and objective reasoning. It emphasized the fact that the townward movement of the natives was an economic phenomenon which could be guided and regulated but which it was impossible to turn in the opposite direction. South Africa would, therefore, have to take the necessary measures to deal with a permanent urban native population. It rejected the idea of total segregation: "A course of events that can no longer be changed has made South Africa the common home of races differing so radically from each other that there can be no question of assimilation, yet economically and territorially so intertwined that they are simply compelled from moment to moment to regulate their contacts, to bridge their differences, and to settle their disputes."

The fact that the Nationalists won the

election in May of this year is conclusive proof that there is no substantial body of European opinion in South Africa which will even admit the possibility of the natives at some remote future date achieving political equality with the European. Their subjection and inferiority is permanent. Smuts himself has always avoided a clear formulation of his point of view on this problem. His deputy, Jan Hofmeyr, who is regarded as a "liberal," did state that eventually the natives would have to be represented in parliament by their own people. This statement was used by the Nationalists as their main propaganda weapon, for they maintained that Smuts was surrounded by "kaffir brothers"—a phrase which, like "nigger lover" in the deep South, is the height of the white man's scorn and invective in South Africa.

SEEN from the point of view of the white man, the election of the new government raises two important questions: will it, despite enormous practical difficulties, make an attempt to achieve so-called "separateness" of the races, and what will be the reaction of world opinion to a political philosophy which envisages the permanent subjection of the black, colored, and Asiatic races in Southern Africa? History has conditioned the two million Europeans to think almost entirely in terms of the success or failure of their own wishes, interests, and policies. There is the most powerful psychological resistance to the obvious prediction that the 7,000,000 Bantu, 770,000 Coloreds, and 220,000 Asiatics might have an even more important part to play. It is akin to heresy to formulate this policy. Indeed, if the Nationalists could succeed in enforcing "Apartheid" (separateness), or even a semblance of that ideal, their rule, for all practical purposes, would be indefinite. Doubts are raised only by their inability to do so and the fear that failure would result in chaos. That is why there is a certain timidity on the part of the man who asks: "What is the reaction of the people who are to be separated?"

There is no doubt whatsoever about that reaction. On August 3 the African National

Congress, an embryonic political movement, passed this resolution: "Congress is convinced that a policy of segregation or separation leads to racial antagonism and militates against the full economic development of the country as well as cooperation between White and Black for the common good. We are, therefore, convinced that the only policy which can save South Africa from racial conflicts and economic chaos and disaster is a policy of common citizenship, of equality of opportunity for all sections." This protest is inspired by the small but growing class of African intellectuals. The moderation, the plea for "common citizenship," which characterizes the appeal might very well have taken a Black Fascist direction with the slogan, "Africa for the Africans."

Among the mass of uneducated peasants and the detribalized natives in the cities, there are some traces of that "collective resentment and growing racial self-consciousness" which H. G. Wells envisaged. But how is it to be organized and how is it to find expression? The Communist party offers "equality of opportunity." It is, however, a politically ineffective force. In the general election its candidates polled only 1,783 votes out of a total of 1,067,249. The new government intends to suppress all Communist activities with the utmost determination. But what is even more important, the doctrines of Communism, contrary to popular belief, have so far not found favor with the black peasants. There are other difficulties which have to be faced by the Bantu leader of the future, for so far no outstanding personality has come to the fore.

ONCE white South Africa discovers that territorial and economic segregation—the black reserves and the color bar in industry—are not signposts to Utopia, there is the possibility that a more liberal party will emerge—a party which wants the rapid development and education of the natives to enable them to take their place in a multi-racial democracy.

At present such a suggestion made from a political platform would be treated as harmless lunacy.

The Afrikaners are definitely embarked on a new episode in their saga of racial development, the establishment of "Apartheid." The saga will become a tragedy if they fail; and yet it is only in failure that there appears to be any hope for the eight million people in South Africa who, unlike the Afrikaners, have not been "God-ordained to superiority and rule."

At the present moment the Nationalists are busy trying to give Apartheid some semblance of a patchwork reality, having a strong fear of the black man—who was, after all, responsible for their victory. At the same time, the present Parliament reveals clearly the Nationalist desire to placate European sections, particularly the British and the Jews.

Recently, assurances have been given that Jews will be admitted to membership in the Nationalist party, and that the government would not practice discrimination against Jews. For the Nationalists realize they must carefully measure their moves against a possible international reaction which, they know, may once again lead to their downfall.